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NEA 439 SA

NATIONWIDE TEACHER OPINION POLL - 1982

Highlights

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The 1982 Nationwide Teacher Opinion Poll was sent to 1,867 of the nation's 2,186,000 public school teachers . This sample survey is the latest in a series of annual surveys designed to assess the opinions of public school teachers on timely issues. Exactly 1,295 questionnaires were returned, which equals a 69.3 percent response rate.

The sample size was selected so that the responses would be highly reliable estimates of the opinions and attitudes of all public school teachers, that is, at a 95-percent confidence level:

1. The standard error for population estimates is less than 3 percent. For example, if a sample percentage is 60 percent, then one can be fairly confident (correct 95 times in 100 times) that the population percentage is between 57 and 63 percent.

2. The standard error for estimating population difference in percentages is less than 5 percent. For example, if two sample percentages differ by 5 percent of more, then one can be fairly confident (correct 95 times in 100 times) that the population percentages are different.

The teacher opinion poll highlights that follow are grouped according to topical areas: demographics (p.2), back-to-basics (p.3), retirement (p.4), gifted and talented students (p.4), censorship (p.5), use of technology (p.5), student discipline/violence (p.5), standardized testing (p.6), private enterprise in schools (p.7), fringe benefits (p.7), political (p.7), taxation issues (p.8), reduction inforce/layoffs (p.8). For more detailed information, contact Dr. Sheridan, NEA Research 202/822-7442.

Demographics

- The respondents are fairly evenly distributed over the four regions of the country, about one-fifth in the Northeast states (20 percent), and Southeast states (19 percent), and the remaining three-fifths equally divided between the Middle states (31 percent), and Western states (30 percent).

- The majority of respondents (61 percent) are from school systems with less than 12,000 students; 43 percent, with less than 3,000 students; and 34 percent, with more than 3,000 but less than 12,000 students. About one-fourth (24 percent) are from school systems with more than 12,000 but less than 50,000 students. Only 10 percent are from school systems with 100,000 or more students.

- About 80 percent classify themselves as regular classroom teachers; and over 10 percent, as special education teachers. The other 10 percent are part-time teachers, resource teachers, special assignment teachers, etc.

- Half (50 percent) work at the elementary level; more than one-fourth, (29 percent), at the middle school/junior high level; and one-third (33 percent), at the senior high school level; some teach at more than one level.

- More than one-half (58 percent) teach in departmentalized situations; and nearly one-third (31 percent), in self-contained classrooms. About 7 percent are in team-teaching situations. Only 3 percent teach kindergarten or prekindergarten involving multiple classes.

- In the departmentalized situations more teach English/language arts (22 percent) than any other subject. Other subjects taught by a significant number are mathematics (13 percent), science (14 percent), social studies (15 percent), and health and physical education (9 percent). Between 3 and 6 percent each teach art, business education, foreign language, home economics, industrial arets and music.

- Over half of the teachers have more than four years of college; 46 percent hold Master degrees; less than 1 percent, doctorate and about 6 percent hold a degree based on six years of college study. Nearly half (48 percent) have a bachelor's degree.

- The majority (65 percent) have 5 to 19 total years of teaching experience. About 14 percent have fewer than 5 years, while 21 percent have 20 years or more. The mean total years of experience is 13 and the median 12, compared to a mean of 11 years and a median of 10 years experience in the present school system.

- Almost half (48 percent) teach in a small town (33 percent) or a rural area (15 percent). The rest teach in a suburban area (29 percent), the inner core of a city (12 percent), or in another part of a city (12 percent).

- Over three-fourths (81 percent) are members of NEA.

- The current mean ANNUAL CONTRACT SALARY is $18,977 ($18,342 for elementary teachers; $19,508 for secondary teachers; $20,334 for men; $18,255 for women; $20,132 in the Northeast states; $15,889 in the Southeast states; $19,283 in the Middle states; $19,921 in the Western states; $19,979 in city areas; $20,514 in suburban areas; $17,515 in small town/rural areas).

- Among the two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) who are members of a double income family, over one-fourth (30 percent) reported combined family incomes of less than 30,000 and only 13 percent reported combined incomes exceeding $50,000.

- The mean faculty size reported is 25 teachers in the elementary schools and 59 teachers in the secondary schools.

- The mean number of students enrolled in the respondents' schools is 492 in elementary and 1,038 in secondary schools.

- About two-thirds (66 percent) of all teachers are female, whose median age is 37, and also have 11 years of teaching experience; 34 percent are male, whose median age is 39, and have 13 years of teaching experience.

- Nearly three-fourths (74 percent) are presently married. Of those not married, 11 percent have been previously married.

- Racially, the great majority (89 percent) are white; while nearly 10 percent are black, 1 percent Asian, and 0.6 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native. In regard to ethnic background, 2 percent are Hispanic, with 1.6 percent Mexican-American and 0.4 percent Puerto Rican.

- Thirty-three percent do not consider themselves to be affiliated with any political party. Over two-thirds (67 percent) of the respondents classify themselves either as a Democrat (44 percent) or a Republican (23 percent). Only 0.3 percent are affiliated with another political party.

Back-to-Basics

- Respondents were provided a list of practices that are associated with the back-to-basics movement. The percent indicating the practice is occurring in their <u>school</u> is show after the practice.

  - Increased emphasis on basic curricula . . . . . .(81 percent)
  - Stricter discipline enforced . . . . . .(57 percent)
  - Stricter attendance enforced . . . . . .(56 percent)
  - More grouping/tracking of students . . . . . .(54 per

- Higher student achievement standard required . . . . . .(50 percent)
- Students retained in class/grade until they perform satisfactorily . . . . . .(42 percent)
- Increased student homework . . . . . .(33 percent)
- Students required to pass a test for promotion/ graduation . . . . . .(29 percent)

Retirement

- Over one-fourth (27 percent) of the respondents plan to leave teaching before they are eligible for an immediate pension.
- Two-fifths (42 percent) of those planning to leave before pension eligibility plan to leave at least ten years before pension eligibility and another almost equal number (38 percent) plan to leave with six to 10 years remaining before pension eligibility. Almost one-fourth (21 percent) plan to leave with five or less years before pension eleigibility.
- Respondents were asked to indicate which items (from a list) would cause them a major problem and which a minor problem in dealing with the increased cost of pensions due to increased longevity. Below are listed the items with the percent of teachers indicating that the option would cause them a major problem in retirement:
  - Leave retirement ages the same but reduce all monthly benefits . . . . . .(84 percent)
  - Eliminate early retirement options in teacher retirement . . . . . .(72 percent)
  - Raise the normal teacher retirement age three years . .(71 percent)
  - Raise deductions from salaries sufficiently to cover increased cost of extended longevity . . . . . .(62 percent)
  - Move normal Social Security retirement from age 65 to 68 . . . . . .(62 percent)
  - Eliminate the early retirement (age 62) plan from Social Security . . . . . .(55 percent)

Gifted/Creative/Talented Students

- Four-fifths (80 percent) report that their school district provides programs for gifted/creative/talented students. Teachers in city and suburban school districts report they are more likely to have these programs (89 percent) than do teachers in rural districts (71 percent).
- The types of organizations reported for meeting needs of gifted/creative talented students include:

- Removed from the regular class for special instruction part of the time . . . . . .(64 percent)
- Special self-contained classes . . . . . .(31 percent)
- Other organizational techniques . . . . . .(12 percent)

Censorship

- Over one-fifth (22 percent) of the respondents indicate that there is some censorship occurring in their school building.
- Where censorship occurred, the types of censorship most common were those involving teaching materials. Library materials were most reported (56 percent). Textbooks (38 percent), and curricula (36 percent) were also frequently reported as objects of censorship.
- Thirty percent of the respondents reporting some type of censorship said there was censorship of their teaching techniques.

Use of Technology

- In general, respondents see instructional technology as supportive of the educational process but not revolutionary.
- When queried about their belief concerning the future role of microcomputers, 44 percent feel they will enhance teaching and 30 percent see them as only a teaching aid. Only a small minority (7 percent) feel that microcomputers will revolutionize the teaching process. Twenty percent are not aware of microcomputer capabilities.
- Access to computers by students is now widespread as over half of the respondents (53 percent) report their school district provides student access to microcomputers or terminals of large computers. The student access to computers is fairly uniform with approximately one-half reporting student access in their district regardless of size of district, type of community or region of the country.

Student Discipline/Violence

- About one-half (47 percent) say that student behavior interferes to at least some extent with their teaching -- 17 percent believe it interferes to a great extent and 30 percent to a moderate extent. Almost one-fourth (23 percent) of the teachers in cities report that student behavior interferes with their teaching to a <u>great</u> extent.
- Respondents were asked if they supported or opposed various practices to help alleviate student misbehavior problems. The percents supporting the practice are given below with each response option.

  - Parents kept better informed . . . . . .(98 percent)
  - Strict discipline . . . . . .(96 percent)

- MORE vocational programs . . . . . .(86 percent)
- Strict scheduling of student time during the day . .(92 percent)
- Teachers allowed MORE authority to suspend unruly students from class . . . . . .(85 percent)
- MORE work-study opportunities . . . . . .(84 percent)
- Special CLASSES for problem students . . . . . .(82 percent)
- BROADER provisions for suspension . . . . . .(76 percent)
- BROADER provisions for explusion . . . . . .(71 percent)
- Corporal punishment allowed . . . . . .(56 percent)
- Special SCHOOLS for problem students . . . . . .(54 percent)
- Security personnel during school day . . . . . .(41 percent)

- Almost one-fourth (23 percent) report having had personal property stolen by a student over the past 12-month period. Fourteen percent reportedly had personal property damaged intentionally by a student.

- More than one-fourth (25 percent) reported some concern that they may be physically attacked by a student - 1 percent reported constant or frequent concern; 2 percent, occasional concern. At least some concern was reported by 1 in 5 (44 percent) of the city teachers.

- Over half (52 percent) indicate their school district has a reporting procedure for assaults on teachers. This varies by type of community with 73 percent of the teachers in city districts having reporting procedures contrasted with 53 percent for suburban and 40 percent for rural districts.

- Of the school districts with reporting procedures, two thirds (66 percent) also include reporting the assault to the police department.

- Only 31 percent of the respondents indicated their school district has a procedure on "what to do in case of an assault." Fewer (20 percent) report that their district provides inservice courses on dealing with violent, disruptive student behavior.

Standardized Testing

- Over half (56 percent) of the respondents feel that the drop in standardized test scores is due to the tests probably (45 percent) or definitely not (11 percent) measuring what is being taught. Less than half (45 percent) say the drop in test scores is a result of a decline in the quality of education, with 16 percent indicating there has been a definite drop in the quality of education and 29 percent reporting that there is a probable drop in the quality of education.

- Only two-fifths (38 percent) of the respondents feel that standardized tests of students have definitely not been used in evaluating their own teaching performance. Another group of approximately the same size (37 percent) do not think tests of students have been used in teacher evaluation. Six percent are definitely sure that standarized test scores of students have been used in their evaluation, and another 12 percent think their work has been evaluated based in part on students' standardized scores. More elementary teachers think or know students' tests have been used in their evaluation as teachers (21 percent) than is true for secondary teachers (14 percent).

Private Enterprise Influence in Schools

- Over two-fifths (41 percent) think private enterprise is trying to influence schools, teachers and curricula by providing teacher training, curricular materials and equipment in trying to exert such influence. One-fourth do not think private enterprise is affecting schools, and one-third are not sure.

Fringe Benefits

- Over one-third (37 percent) indicate that the fringe benefits they receive as an employee overlap some benefits available to their spouse.

- Almost half (47 percent) think the fringe benefit programs are administered satisfactorily by their school districts, 16 percent think their districts administer programs unsatisfactorily, and over one-third (37 percent) believe their school districts administer some program well and others poorly.

Political Issues

- Fifty percent of the respondents said they approved of President Reagan when he was elected, 22 percent strongly approved and 28 percent somewhat approved. Fifty percent dissapproved of him then.

- Twenty-three percent of the teachers say their opinion of President Reagan has changed during the last six months. Of those with an opinion change, over three-fourths (76 percent) have changed from approval to disapproval of President Reagan, while 24 percent indicate a change from disapproval to approval.

- Over three-fourths (77 percent) favor separate political arms of education associations (Political Action Committees - PACs) working for candidates who support education; 40 percent strongly favor.

- A slightly smaller number (63 percent) support having PACs contribute funds to candidates who support public education. Twenty-seven percent strongly favor.

Taxation

- Teachers are rather pessimistic regarding tax increases. Three-fourths (74 percent) indicated that the voters in their school community would probably vote to reduce state government spending or have already done so.

- Over three-fourths (78 percent) think local voters would vote or have voted to limit local property tax increases.

- Only 10 percent of the teachers feel that the local voters would not support property tax reductions or reduced state government spending for schools.

- Seventy percent of the teachers think providing less money to education would probably (35 percent) or definitely (35 percent) result in a poorer education for students in their community.

- Six percent definitely think less money for education would not result in education quality reductions. Twenty-four percent think education of students would probably not deteriorate with less money available.

Reduction in Force/Layoffs

- Almost one-tenth (9 percent) of the currently employed teachers received notice last spring that they might not be employed for the current school year.

- Of that 10 percent, almost three-fourths returned to their former positions one-fourth received a different position in the same school district and 3 percent went to another school district for employment.